Message Text

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PR 031132Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8285

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

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AMEMBASSY PARIS

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DEPT PASS TO DIA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, MARR, WA

SUBJECT: SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN NAMIBIA

REF: (A) PRETORIA 3771, (B) PRETORIA 3609, (C) PRETORIA 3807,

1. SUMMARY: CONVERSATIONS IN OVAMBO AND VISUAL OBSERVATIONS DURING A RECENT TRIP TO OSAKATI AND ODANGUA BY THE EMBASSY CONFIDENTIAL

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POLITICAL COUNSELOR INDICATE THAT SWAPO IS INCREASING ITS PRESSURE BUT THAT THE LEVEL OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY IS STILL RELATIVELY LOW. CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICIALS SEE NO WAY IN WHICH THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY CAN SUCCESSFULLY END THE TERRORIST WAR. THE SAG, HOWEVER, APPEARS HOPEFUL THAT, EVEN IF THERE IS NO POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, THE EXPANDED RECRUITMENT OF LOCAL BLACK BATTALIONS AND THE EFFORTS OF UNITA IN ANGOLA WILL EVENTUALLY

STABILIZE THE SECURITY SITUATION AND PERHAPS PERMIT SIGNIFICANT WITHDRAWALS OF THE SADF. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK BATTALIONS IN NAMIBIA AS A COUNTER TO SWAPO REFLECTS THE SAG'S EXPECTION OF A TURNHALLE-LED INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA. THIS MOVE MAY COMPLICATE THE EFFORT OF THE WESTERN POWERS TO PROMOTE AN INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. END SUMMARY.

- 2. ACCORDING TO THE COMMISSIONER-GENERAL FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, JANNIE DE WET, SWAPO GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN OVAMBO HAS EXPANDED IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS. THE RECENT INCREASE, HE SAID, FOLLOWS AN UNUSUAL LULL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, POSSIBLY RELATED TO THE POLITICAL SPLIT IN SWAPO. THE NORMAL PATTERN, ACCORDING TO DE WET, HAS BEEN FOR MORE GUERRILLA ACTION IN OVAMBO IN THE RAINY SUMMER SEASON THAN THE DRY WINTER. THE COMMISSIONER ALSO REPORTED THAT SWAPO AT PRESENT APPEARS TO BE CONCENTRATING ITS ACTIVITIES ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE OVAMBO FRONT, WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN RELATIVELYQUIET. KAVANGO, HE SAID, IS EASY TO DEFEND BECAUSE OF THE CONCENTRATION OF THE POPULATION ALONG THE RIVER.
- 3. OVERALL, THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS REMAIN RELATIVELY LOW. DE WET DECLINED TO GIVE FIGURES, BUT ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT TESTIMONY AT THE RECENT TERRORIST TRIAL IN WINDHOEK, THE FOLLOWING GUERRILLA ACTIONS OCCURRED FROM AUGUST 1, 1975 TO JUNE 30. 1977:

62 PEOPLE MURDERED 101 ATTEMPTS TO MURDER OR MAIM CONFIDENTIAL.

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21 ROBBERY RAIDS 216 PEOPLE ABDUCTED.

- 4. THE SADF, WHICH CLAIMS TO HAVE ONLY 5,000 MEN IN THE SOUTH WEST COMBAT AREA--MOSTLY IN OVAMBO--APPEARS TO BE ENGAGED IN A HOLDING OPERATION, EMPLOYING LARGELY REACTIVE TACTICS. (FOR A DETAILED REPORT OF THE SADF DEPLOYMENT AND TACTICS IN THE COMBAT ZONE, SEE DAO IR 6880023477.) ALONG THE PAVED HIGHWAY FROM THE BORDER TO OSAKATI ONE SEES NUMEROUS SADF MILITARY ENCAMPMENTS SURROUNDED BY PRIMITIVE MUD WALLS. SIMILAR FORTS ARE REPORTEDLY SCATTERED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THE VICINITY OF THE BORDER. DE WET SAID THE ARMY AVOIDED SMALL ISOLATED POSTS AND MAINTAINED INSTEAD A RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBER OF WELL-ARMED COMPOUNDS. OSAKATI AND ONDANGUA THEMSELVES ARE NOT ACTUAL TOWNS BUT ARMED CAMPS FOR WHITE ADMINISTRATORS, MILITARY OFFICERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THOSE WHITES PREVIOUSLY LOCATED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE REPORTEDLY MOVED INTO PROTECTED AREAS DURING THE PAST YEAR.
- 5. ACCORDING TO DE WET, TERRORIST ACTIVITY STILL INVOLVES MOSTLY HIT AND RUN EFFORTS AT NIGHT. THE GUERRILLAS KILL OR KIDNAP HEADMEN AND SHOP OWNERS, ABDUCT YOUNG PEOPLE, AND LAY MINES. THE ARMY, DE WET SAID, PRIMARILY REACTS TO INCIDENTS, ATTEMPTING TO TRACK DOWN THE GUERRILLAS BEFORE THEY EXFILTRATE BACK TO

ANGOLA. THE COMMISSIONER ASSERTED THAT BECAUSE OF THE SMALL NUMBER OF SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES IN THE AREA, THERE IS LITTLE OFFENSIVE PATROLLING OR LAYING OF AMBUSHES BY THE SADF. ACTUAL CONTACT WITH THE GUERRILLAS IS LIMITED. THE ARMY'S TASK, HE SAID, IS TO PREVENT SWAPO FROM MAKING LARGE GROUP PENETRATIONS AND HOLDING VILLAGES.

6. DE WET SAID THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO REGROUPING VILLAGERS. ALTHOUGH ALL PERSONS LIVING WITHIN 1.000 METERS OF THE BORDER HAVE BEEN REQUIRED TO MOVE. ACCORDING TO OTHER SOURCES, OVAMBOS IN THE AREA ARE DISMAYED AT THE ESTABLISH-MENT OF A NO-MAN'S LAND ALONG THE BORDER WHICH BEFORE DID NOT EFFECTIVELY EXIST FOR THE LOCAL POPULATION. IN A PRIVATE CONVERSATION, LUTHERAN BISHOP AUALA CHARGED THAT MANY "TERRORIST CONFIDENTIAL

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CASUALTIES" WERE ACTUALLY OVAMBO VILLAGERS ON THEIR WAY TO VISIT RELATIVES ACROSS THE BORDER.

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PR 031132Z AUG 77 FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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7. DE WET ASSERTED THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY COULD NEVER HOPE TO DEFEAT THE GUERRILLAS SO LONG AS THEY ENJOY A SANCTUARY. HE SAID HE HAD FINALLY CONVINCED THE SADF THAT ONLY A LOCAL FORCE WHICH SPOKE THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE COULD COUNTER SWAPO'S INFILTRATION TACTICS. ACCORDING TO DE WET, THERE ARE NOW 300 OVAMBO MILITIA AND 700 IN THE OVAMBO BATTALION. MBURUMBU KERINA, THE EX-SWAPO OVAMBO NOW ASSOCIATED WITH THE TURNHALLE, SAID THAT THE FULL 1,000-MAN BATTALION HAD BEEN RECENTLY INAUGURATED. CONFIDENTIAL

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- 8. SOME OF THE OVAMBO RECRUITS HAVE RECEIVED TRAINING LOCALLY WHILE OTHERS HAVE REPORTEDLY GONE TO SOUTH AFRICA FOR MORE ADVANCED SCHOOLING. MEMBERS OF THE OVAMBO BATTALION RECEIVE 65 RAND A MONTH PLUS ROOM AND BOARD--ATTRACTIVE COMPENSATION IN OVAMBO. SOME OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, CLAIM THE GOVERNMENT HAS FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO RECRUIT YOUNG MEN FOR THE BATTALION. SWAPO OFFICIALS IN WINDHOEK ASSERTED THAT MANY BATTALION RECRUITS WERE IN FACT UNITA REFUGEES. ON TH OTHER HAND, DE WET MAINTAINED THAT SINCE ENDING THE REQUIREMENT FOR A STANDARD-EIGHT EDUCATION, OVAMBO VOLUNTEERS HAS SWAMPED THE RECRUITING OFFICE. A NON-GOVERNMENT SOURCE IN OVAMBO ALSO REPORTED THAT HE HAD HEARD FROM OFFICERS CONCERNED WITH THE BATTALION THAT THERE WAS A SURPLUS OF VOLUNTEERS.
- 9. DE WET AND KERINA BOTH SAID THE GOVERNMENT WOULD FURTHER EXPAND THE OVAMBO BATTALION. THE COMMISSIONER NOTED THAT WITH EACH NEW VOLUNTEER THE GOVERNMENT ALSO POLITICALLY RECRUITED HIS FAMILY. BOTH MEN FORESAW THE DAY WHEN THIS LOCAL FORCE COULD POSSIBLY REPLACE THE SADF IN OVAMBOLAND. AS REPORTED EARLIER (REF A), THE SAG IS FORMING SIMILAR ETHNIC BATTALIONS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH WEST. (AT PRESENT, UNITS ARE BEING TRAINED OR PLANNED FOR KAVANGO, REHOBOTH, NAMALAND, DAMARALAND AND HEREROLAND.) "COMMANDO" (NATIONAL GUARD-TYPE) UNITS HAVE EXISTED FOR SOME TIME IN THE WHITE AREAS OF THE SOUTH WEST. CONTINGENTS OF THESE COMMANDOS AS WELL AS WHITE RESERVISTS FROM THE SOUTH WEST REGULARLY SERVE IN OVAMBO. THE NEW LOCAL FORCES TOGETHER WITH THE WHITE UNITS ARE INTENDED TO SERVE AS THE ETHNIC CONSTITUENTS OF A NAMIBIAN ARMY SHOULD THE TURNHALLE GROUP LEAD THE COUNTRY TO INDEPENDENCE.

10. BISHOP AUALA AND OTHER ANTI-SAG OBSERVERS PRIVATELY COMPLAINED THAT BLACKS IN THE OVAMBO BATTALION WERE LESS CONFIDENTIAL

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DISCIPLINED THAN THE SADF AND MORE DANGEROUS TO THE LOCAL POPULATION. THEY CHARGED THAT IN ANY FUTURE ELECTION THE OVAMBO SOLDIERS WOULD, LIKE THE TRIBAL POLICE, SERVE AS BULLY BOYS FOR THE LOCAL TRADITIONAL LEADERS. IT IS, IN FACT, A COMMON SIGHT ALONG THE ROAD TO OSAKATI TO OBSERVE BLACKS, BOTH IN AND OUT OF UNIFORM, STROLLING ALONG WITH FN AUTOMATICS. WHEN ASKED, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IDENTIFIED THESE BLACKS AS PROBABLY OFFDUTY MEMBERS OF THE OVAMBO BATTALION.

SADF DEVELOPMENT

11. ON JULY 29, THE SAG ANNOUNCED THE APPOINTMENT OF MAJOR-GENERAL J.J. GELDENHUYS AS "OFFICER COMMANDING WOUTH WEST AFRICA." DEFENSE MINISTER P.W. BOTHA TOLD THE PRESS THAT "THE APPOINTMENT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLICY TO BUILD AND DEVELOP AN INDEPENDENT AND COMPLETE DEFENSE FORCE FOR SOUTH WEST AFRICA." ACCORDING TO DAO SOURCES, THE SAG UPGRADED THE POSITION OF OC, SWA COMMAND FROM BRIGADIER TO MAJOR-GENERAL AS IT EXPECTS THAT THE NEW INCUMBENT WILL BE THE PRINCIPAL MILITARY ADVISOR TO THE NEW NAMIBIAN GOVERNMENT.

12. BOTHA EXPLAINED THAT THE SA DEFENSE FORCE "IS CONCENTRATING AT PRESENT ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL PREPARATION AND TRAINING OF ALL THE ELEMENTS OF THE SOUTH WEST AFRICA POPULATION SO THAT ALL WILL HAVE THE RIGHT TO SHARE FULLY IN THE DEFENSE OF THE FUTURE SWA." DAO ALSO REPORTS THAT THE SADF IS CONTINUING TO INVEST LARGE SUMS IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND MODERNIZATION OF PERMANENT MILITARY BASES IN THE SOUTH WEST ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE NEW NAMIBIAN GOVERNMENT WILL ASK THE SAG TO ASSIST IN PROVIDING FOR ITS DEFENSE.

SWAPO'S SUPPORT

13. IN NUMEROUS CONVERSATIONS, GOVERNMENT OFICIALS AND TURNHALLE OVAMBOS ASSERTED THAT SWAPO TERRORISM HAD TURNED THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE ORGANIZATION. SOME NEUTRAL OBSERVERS SUCH AS LOCAL WINDHOEK JOURNALISTS BELIEVE THAT THE SPLIT IN SWAPO LAST YEAR AND THE SUBSEQUENT DETENTION IN ZAMBIA AND TANZANIA AT NUJOMA'S BEHEST OF HUNDREDS OF SWAPO MEMBERS HAD ALSO REDUCED CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PARTY'S SUPPORT AT HOME. PRO-SWAPO FIGURES, INCLUDING MANY CHURCHMEN, DISCOUNTED THESE ALLEGATIONS.

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ALL SIDES, HOWEVER, BELIEVE THAT SWAPO'S PRESTIGE HAS RISEN IN RECENT MONTHS BECAUSE OF ITS ENHANCED INTERNATIONAL STANDING. DR. DE VRIES, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, RECENTLY ESTIMATED PUBLICLY THAT SINCE THE WESTERN INITIATIVE BEGAN, SWAPO'S POPULAR SUPPORT HAS INCREASED FROM 40 TO 60 PERCENT.

THE SADF PRESENCE CONFIDENTIAL

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14. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT SWAPO IS ENGAGING

IN A SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SADF. IN A RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENT, LT. GENERAL J. R. DUTTON, CHIEF OF STAFF OPERATIONS, WARNED OF THIS SWAPO TACTIC. THERE ARE, IN FACT, NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE SADF. BISHOP AUALA AND OTHERS PRIVATELY SPOKE AT LENGTH OF THE "SUFFERING" OF THE OVAMBO PEOPLE AT THE HANDS OF THE WHITE TROOPS. ANGLICAN BISHOP EDWARD MORROW, READING FROM HIS NOTES OF A RECENT DIOCESAN CONFERENCE, QUOTED NUMEROUS ANGLICAN CLERICS IN OVAMBO WHO CITED THIS PROBLEM AS THE PREOCCUPATION OF THEIR PEOPLE.

15. AT THE SAME TIME, BOTH SIDES ATTESTED TO THE IMPORTANT POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLE OF THE SADF PRESENCE. DE WET SAID THAT AFRICANS RESPECT THOSE WHO HAVE POWER; IF THE ARMY WITHDRAWS, THE OVAMBOS WILL ASSUME THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS LOST THE CONTEST AND THEY WILL RUSH TO BACK SWAPO. MAKING THE SAME POINT FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION, AUALA AS WELL AS SWAPO REGIONAL SECRETARY HILUNDUA CHARGED THAT THE PRESENCE OF SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES, EVEN IF RESTRICTED TO THEIR CAMPS, WOULD INTIMIDATE THE POPULATION.

16. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN NAMIBIA CREDIT UNITA'S RECENT VICTORY CLAIMS IN ANGOLA. THIS ATTITUDE MAY IN PART BE WISHFUL THINKING, BUT UNITA'S CAPTURE IN LATE JULY OF CUANGAR (REF B) HAS LENT SOME CREDENCE TO THESE CLAIMS. THE SOUTH AFRICANS ARE OF COURSE HOPEFUL THAT EXPANDED UNITA ACTIVITIES ALONG THE BORDER WILL INHIBIT SWAPO. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SAG WISHES TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF INTERFERRING IN ANGOLA LEST IT STIMULATE FURTHER CUBAN INVOLVEMENT, EMBARRASS SAVIMBI AND BRING ADDITIONAL UN PRESSURE ON SOUTH AFRICA. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SAG, ACCORDING TO DE WET, HAS MADE NUMEROUS UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO CONTACT THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT ABOUT RECENT INCIDENTS ALONG THE BORDER. THE COMMISSIONER ALSO MADE A POINT OF DENYING ANY SOUTH AFRICAN ASSISTANCE TO UNITA. WE WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SOUTH AFRICANS ARE PROVIDING SOME ASSISTANCE.

EFFECTS ON A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT
17. THE CREATION OF THE BLACK BATTALIONS MAY
COMPLICATE THE WESTERN INITIATIVE. WITH AN EXPANDED
LOCAL FORCE IN PLACE IN OVAMBO, THE SAG WOULD POSSIBLY
BE WILLING TO CONSIDER SOME WITHDRAWAL OF THE SADF.
FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA INDICATED THIS POSSIBILITY
IN HIS TALKS WITH THE FIVE WESTERN AMBASSADORS ON
AUGUST 1 (REF C.). SWAPO, HOWEVER, IS IN FACT LIKELY

TO VIEW THE PRESENC OF THE OVAMBO-TYPE BATTALIONS AS MORE INTIMIDATING THAN THAT OF THE SADF. SWAPO MAY WELL INSIST THAT THE TRANSITION AUTHORITY DISARM ALL OF THE BLACK BATTALIONS THROUGHOUT NAMIBIA BEFORE THE PROPOSED ELECTIONS. THE SOUTH AFRICANS WILL BE RELUCTANT TO DISBAND THE BLACK UNITS, MOST OF WHICH HAVE ONLY RECENTLY BEGUN TO FORM. THE CONTACT GROUP MAY WANT TO ADDRESS THIS QUESTION BEFORE THE SAG MOVES TOO FAR DOWN ITS PRESENT COURSE.

18. AT THE SAME TIME THE NATURE AND LEVEL OF THE FIGHTING ALONG THE ANGOLA-NAMIBIA BORDER SUGGEST THAT LOCAL CONDITIONS ARE NOT UNFAVORABLE FOR A DISENGAGEMENT PROVIDED BOTH SIDES HAVE THE POLITICAL WILL TO PROCEED IN THAT DIRECTION. THE PRESENT LIMITED LEVEL OF OPERATIONS ON BOTH SIDES; UNITA'S CURRENT ACTIVITY IN THE BORDER AREA OF ANGOLA AND ITS HOSTILITY TOWARDS SWAPO; THE HIT-ANDRUN NATURE OF SWAPO'S GUERRILLA TACTICS FROM ANGOLAN BASES RATHER THAN FROM WITHIN NAMIBIA; AND THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCENTRATION OF THE SADF IN A LIMITED NUMBER OF POSITIONS AND ITS BASIC TACTIC OF REACTING TO SWAPO INCURSIONS COMBINE TO MAKE AN AGREEMENT ON THE KEY ISSUE OF SECURITY LESS COMPLICATED IN TERMS OF SUSPENDING MILITARY OPERATIONS THAN IN RHODESIA. BOWDLER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X

Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am Channel Indicators: n/a

Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

Concepts: SECURITY, REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION

Control Number: n/a

Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 03-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am

Decaption Note:

Disposition Action: RELEASED Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW

Disposition Date: 22 May 2009 Disposition Event: Disposition Event:
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PRETOR03844
Document Source: CORE

Document Unique ID: 00

Drafter: n/a Enclosure: n/a Executive Order: GS

Errors: N/A **Expiration:**

Film Number: D770278-0153

Format: TEL From: PRETORIA Handling Restrictions: n/a

Image Path: ISecure: 1

Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197708101/aaaadhxy.tel

Line Count: 418 Litigation Code IDs: Litigation Codes:

Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 12be8c4e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc

Office: ACTION AF

Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a

Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a

Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 PRETORIA 3771, 77 PRETORIA 3609, 77 PRETORIA 3807

Retention: 0

Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED Review Content Flags: Review Date: 09-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am

Review Event:

Review Exemptions: n/a **Review Media Identifier:** Review Release Date: n/a Review Release Event: n/a **Review Transfer Date:** Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a

SAS ID: 1403374 Secure: OPEN Status: NATIVE

Subject: SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN NAMIBIA

TAGS: PINS, MARR, WA

To: STATE Type: TE

vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/12be8c4e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc

Review Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009